RETURN

TO

AN ADDRESS OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS,

Dated March 7, 1842,

FOR

"COPIES of any Communications which may have been received from "Captain Elliot, explaining or having any bearing upon the "transactions with the Chinese Authorities, which are adverted "to in Viscount Canning's letter to the Secretary of the "Treasury, of the 3rd day of November, 1841; but which had "not been received at the date of that letter."

The transactions adverted to in Viscount Canning's letter of the 3rd of November, 1841, are the demand and the receipt from the Chinese Authorities, of the sum of six millions of dollars, under certain Articles entered into by those Authorities on the 27th of May, 1841.

No report has been made by Captain Elliot to the Foreign Office, of his negotiations with the Kwang-chow-foo, which terminated in the signature by that officer of the Articles of Agreement; but Captain Elliot, in a letter to the Earl of Aberdeen, dated the 25th of January, 1842, gives an account of the proceedings at Canton, in the month of May, 1841; and an Extract of this letter is the only return which the Foreign Office has the means of making to the Address of the House of Commons of the 7th of March, 1842.

Extract of a Letter from Captain Elliot to the Earl of Aberdeen, dated 53, Cadogan Place, January 25, 1842.

I MUST give some account of the circumstances out of which the second movement upon Canton in May, 1841, arose.

The trade of the season was now fairly off, and I was rid, therefore, of one great anxiety, and of the chief motive for remaining at Canton; and as the spring advanced, it became of importance to set forward to the northward without further delay, in order to begin operations before the intense heat should set in. The reinforcements had not arrived, but, nevertheless, on the 13th of May, every arrangement had been completed for an immediate departure up the coast. But though the trade of the season had been sent home, there were still, of course, lives, and property, and interests of great magnitude to be left behind us at Canton; and during the two months of truce which had elapsed, secret preparations had been made by the Imperial Commissioners in violation of the terms of it, and which threatened danger to these interests, and this life and property, if we should leave them without a force adequate for their protection. The obvious purpose of these preparations was to detain us to the southward till the favourable monsoon for proceeding up the coast had passed away. Thus it became necessary to destroy these preparations.

They were of a somewhat formidable nature. Heavy masses of troops had been daily pouring into the city from the other provinces, and the lines of defence between the Dutch and French Follies had been strongly armed and fortified. At length, one of the batteries which we had carried and dismantled in the operations of March, (in the Shameen, or western suburb,) was re-armed, contrary to express understanding that no re-armament should take place in any of the works we had allowed them to re-occupy. As soon as I had authentically ascertained this fact, I demanded the immediate disappearance of that and every kind of warlike preparation, and declared that I must hold a contrary course to be a violation of the truce.

The Chinese Authorities evaded these demands, and at once placed us in a situation to strike a heavy and swift blow on the spot, and disembarrass ourselves of all this preparation before we went northwards. The measure was otherwise very agreeable to my own sense of the public convenience, for I had reason to know there was a large mass of treasure collected in the Imperial Treasury for the purpose of carrying on the war; and it was also desirable to avail ourselves of so suitable an occasion for withdrawing the vessels of war from the river for operation to the north, as the result of a successful stroke would afford. It had been necessary to keep eight or nine sail constantly in the river, (from Whampoa and in the channels upwards,) to secure the objects of the Convention of March.

The definite political purposes in view at the moment were to break up the large contingent force from the other provinces assembled at Canton, to destroy the formidable aggressive preparation of the last two months, and to tame the spirit and cripple the resources of the Government, by dismissing the Imperial Commissioners, and levying a contribution on the Treasury in part satisfaction of the heavy demands of Her Majesty's Government.

With these purposes, and after previous concert with the military and naval authorities, I moved them, on the 17th of May, to lose no time in directing the whole force upon Canton; and I repaired there myself the same day to watch proceedings, collect information, and take care that the safety of the merchants remaining there should not be hazarded by too long continuance in the factories.

By the 21st of May, the main body of the force had arrived within ten miles of Canton; and having ground to believe, from private and trustworthy sources of information, that the moment of outbreak was at hand, I warned the remaining merchants to depart, and embarked myself on the evening of that day.

At 11, P.M., (21st,) the enemy opened their attack with a very steadily-directed attempt to fire the ships of war lying in the immediate neighbourhood of the factories, under cover of a creditable cannonade from the work recently re-armed, and others along shore, which had been well masked, the whole supported by a powerful flotilla, ready to act according to circumstances.

But the military operations have been so amply reported, that I may spare any further details on those subjects than may be necessary for the narrative purposes of this paper.

A flotilla of upwards of 100 sail of armed and fire-ships was destroyed, a line of works mounting more than sixty pieces of artillery was carried, and a small British force, moved through ground presenting great natural difficulty, in the face of a numerous enemy, wrested from the enemy, in the space of eight hours, a line of steep and fortified heights, protected by a well-sustained fire from the city walls; routed a heavy mass of troops posted on the immediate left of their own lines; remaining masters of positions that commanded the northern gates and the whole city of Canton.

In this situation of affairs, I was enabled to conclude a Convention with the local authorities, by which the Imperial Commissioners were subjected to the disgrace of forced departure from the city; the troops from the other provinces were constrained to evacuate in the sight of our own force without banners displayed (a sign of humiliation in China); six millions of dollars were recovered from the Imperial Treasury in diminu-

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on 29 March, 2019

tion of the just claims of Her Majesty's Government; a further sum of more than 80,000*l.* has been paid in compensation of the losses occasioned by the destruction of the factories, and certain previous violence committed by the Government of Canton; and we were left in a situation forthwith to withdraw the whole armament from the dangerous effect of the river service upon the health of the force, for movement to the northward.

This is the statement of what was achieved by the brief campaign of less than ten days.

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